

Eden District Council

**Community Services Portfolio
21 October 2010**

Updated Communication Strategy

Report of the Director of Policy and Performance

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report presents the Portfolio Holder with the final version of the updated Communication Strategy for approval.

2 Recommendation:

It is recommended that:

- a) The Portfolio Holder approves the final updated Communication Strategy.
- b) The Communication Strategy is placed on corporate and members Bulletin Board to raise awareness.

3 Report Details

- 3.1 A draft updated Communication Strategy was produced and has been consulted upon.

- 3.2 Comments were received from staff and from Members of the Executive and the Housing and Community Panel. The comments requested:

- the inclusion of Parish Councils amongst the list of external consultees.
- that the recognition of EDC contribution to partnership projects should be explicitly required and stated.
- that the Council is committed to openness and transparency and only truly confidential items have restricted access.

All comments have been incorporated into the updated plan.

- 3.3 The Communication Strategy is therefore now finalised and the Portfolio Holder is requested to approve it for distribution to Members and staff.

- 3.4 The following appendices are attached to this report:

Appendix A the Updated draft Communication Strategy (including EIA as Appendix 1).

- 3.5 Following adoption of the strategy an Action Plan will be developed in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and will be monitored regularly.

4 Policy Framework

4.1 The Council has four corporate priorities which are:

- Affordable Housing
- Quality Environment
- Economic Vitality
- Quality Council

Council on 7 February 2008 agreed fifteen strategic actions to achieve these priorities.

4.2 Council communications help to meet the Quality Council priority.

5 Implications

5.1 Legal

5.1.1 All communications are required to meet relevant statutory requirements arising from the various equalities legislation, the Data Protection Act and Disability Discrimination Act.

5.2 Financial

5.2.1 As part of the 2008-11 corporate planning process the Council adopted a resource prioritisation process in which every area of Council activity was allocated to one of four resource categories. These categories (which were agreed at Council on 7 February 2008) remain in force until the next corporate plan is adopted.

This service falls within category B of the resource allocation process:

Resource Allocation Category	Service Type	Investment description
B	Services which are a corporate priority and where modest but consistent improvement is required	Investment would be made either: i) To make modest improvement to existing performance or ii) On an 'invest to save' basis to improve performance related to a business case or iii) Where new legislation/standards are imposed.

5.2.2 Expenditure of communication activities is contained within agreed budgets.

5.3 Equality and Diversity

5.3.1 The Council has to have regard to the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment and the promotion of equality under the Equality Act 2006 and related statutes.

5.3.2 This is addressed in the EIA (included in Communication Strategy as Appendix 1).

5.4 Environmental

- 5.4.1 The Council has to have due regard to conserving bio-diversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
- 5.4.2 There are no known bio-diversity and sustainability issues.

5.5 Crime and Disorder

- 5.5.1 Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 the Council has to have regard to the need to reduce crime and disorder in exercising any of its functions.
- 5.5.2 None.

5.6 Children

- 5.6.1 Under the Children Act 2004 the Council has to have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the exercise of any of its functions.
- 5.6.2 The responsibilities of staff in considering when and how images of children may be used is an important area of safeguarding children and is addressed in the Communication Toolkit.

5.7 Risk Management

- 5.7.1 Risk Management is a process whereby attempts are made to identify, actively control and reduce risk to protect the Council. This covers not only the traditional areas of insurable risk but also the organisational risk that the Council faces in undertaking all its activities.
- 5.7.2 The development and implementation of the Communication Strategy is designed to tackle and where possible improve the Council's reputation by providing clear guidance to staff and Members on communication issues.

6 Reasons for decision/recommendation

- 6.1 To enable Scrutiny Members to comment upon the Council's Communication Strategy prior to its approval.

Ruth Atkinson
Director of Policy and Performance

Governance Checks:

Checked by or on behalf of the Chief Finance Officer	✓
Checked by or on behalf of the Monitoring Officer	✓

Background Papers:

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Approved by:
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Review Frequency: Bi-annual
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Communication Strategy

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Accessibility Information

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1. Communication Policy

- 1.1. The Council recognises the importance of communication.
- 1.2. The Council is committed to openness and transparency and only truly confidential items have restricted access.
- 1.3. We will communicate clearly, openly, accurately and regularly with the public, our professional partners, and each other in order to promote mutual understanding, and to achieve our aim: 'to best serve the people of Eden'.
- 1.4. All our communication will be produced in clear English, written for its intended audience and will be unambiguous, timely and of an appropriate quality.
- 1.5. All media and communications the Council produces will adhere to the Council's:
 - Communication Strategy
 - Corporate Identity Guidelines
 - Media Relations Protocol
 - Consultation and Engagement Strategy
 - Writing for the Web Guidelines
 - Use of Photographic Images of Children Policy
 - Customer Charter
 - Service Standards
 - Information Management Strategy
 - Code of recommended practice on local authority publicity
- 1.6. All communication and promotional material issued by us will be branded and therefore clearly identifiable as having come from the Council, and will include key contact details and an accessibility statement.
- 1.7. All Council communication, internal or external, will show respect for those to whom it is addressing. It will be prepared in line with other appropriate Council policies concerning Freedom of Information, Data Protection, fairness, equality and customer care.

2. Key Principles of Good Communication

- 2.1. We are committed to providing excellent communications to all audiences and therefore embracing some key principles, which we expect anyone communicating on our behalf, to recognize and follow:
 - Honest and open, two-way communication.
 - Strong, accurate and easily accessible communication.

- All communication - spoken, written (whether presented on paper or electronically) - should be clear, easily understood, timely and kept up to date.
- All Council communications should adhere to our Corporate Identity Guidelines and be easily and instantly identifiable as originating from Eden District Council.
- All communication should be accessible to those who we are intending it to benefit from it, including groups we recognise as being hard to reach. The words and images used in communication should demonstrate inclusivity, and be appealing to all appropriate audiences.
- When communicating as part of a partnership, care must be taken to ensure all parties are happy with communication plans. The message, the tools and the timings should be agreed in advance.

3. Introduction

- 3.1. This strategy was last revised in 2007 and a number of factors have made an update necessary. The Action Plan, outlined after the strategy was last agreed, has been completed. New priorities for communication will be drawn from this strategy to take forward and be implemented as an Action Plan.
- 3.2. The work undertaken during this period has included the development of revised Corporate Identity Guidelines, including new document templates to ensure communications are clearly identifiable as having been produced by the Council, to help raise public awareness of the services we provide.
- 3.3. As a background to this work, the Council continues to receive high praise and good scores for its services from external auditing bodies, and it was the highest ranking local authority in Cumbria in the recent One Place Comprehensive Area Assessment, scoring highly for its performance and financial management.
- 3.4. Local residents' satisfaction with certain Council services also shines through in public surveys, particularly for leisure provision, revenues and benefits and waste and recycling.
- 3.5. Unfortunately, Eden District Council's overall corporate reputation is poor and mirrors that of politics nationally with much public dissatisfaction. Public satisfaction levels for individual areas of Council operation are high but are not being transferred into an acceptable overall Council satisfaction rating.
- 3.6. Overall public satisfaction ratings for councils in Cumbria are on a par with their counterparts nationally with most fairing between 25-40%. To take steps to improve this scenario, the Council signed up to the Local Government Association's (LGA) Reputation Campaign and has completed the core actions of the first phase.
- 3.7. The major theme of the LGA's Reputation Campaign is that the more informed residents are about a Council's services, the more satisfied they are.
- 3.8. Declining satisfaction with councils is often accounted for by a public misconception that many of the Council's key decisions are made behind closed doors, with no public examination.

- 3.9. Over the past two years this scenario has affected the Council's reputation with frequent media criticism concerning some of the major projects it is involved in and its financial position after the economic downturn - leading people to question whether it provides 'value for money'.
- 3.10. The circumstances that presented themselves in each of these cases meant the Council had to employ largely reactionary media relations, and was unable to proactively plan and be afforded the opportunity to explain the issues to local residents and interest groups, before events unfolded. The domination of local media by one particular media organisation also creates challenges.
- 3.11. The more recently adopted cabinet and leader model of political management is an opportunity for the Council to address these reputational issues, and to position itself closer to the local community. These new arrangements have a clearly defined system of decision making and public accountability.
- 3.12. With the public sector facing major financial cuts, there has never been a more appropriate time to engage effectively with the public about how this will impact on local services.
- 3.13. To embrace these political changes in communication terms, it is necessary to evaluate how the Council communicates effectively; starting with assessing how the Executive communicates with fellow Councillors, so Members feel empowered and informed. Of equal importance is ensuring that the invigorated Scrutiny process is understood both internally and externally, so the public has confidence in the transparency of the Council's decision making.
- 3.14. By invigorating the Scrutiny process and conducting more consultation and engagement with the local community, the Council's reputation can be improved and local people placed at the heart of the services we provide. The role of the Council's Scrutiny Officers and Consultation Officer are already driving this process forward and the Council is engaging with local residents on topical issues.
- 3.15. The Council has gained a great deal of recognition for how it works in partnership with other agencies. This can be seen with the new approach to Appleby Horse Fair being spearheaded by Chief Executive, Kevin Douglas and the community planning work by our Strategic Partnerships Team. This work has had positive communication benefits for the Council, and affords it a platform to build on for the future.
- 3.16. The Communication Officer, Web Admin Team, Consultation Officer and Scrutiny Officers are seeking to work closer together to develop a more fluid process of engagement and interaction with local residents. The foundations of this work are being made by the Engage Eden Project.
- 3.17. The Council's website continues to improve and develop in-line with the latest communication standards and is the Council's primary way of communicating information to the public. Plans are being developed to explore how social media and blogging can be deployed and resourced as a cost effective communications and engagement tool.
- 3.18. The development of the Customer Contact Centre and one central telephone number for accessing services has improved day-to-day customer service standards, and released back office staff to concentrate on other duties.

- 3.19. Internally, the Council has made major improvements to the way it shares, manages and stores its information by moving to a data management system called SharePoint. This has replaced the intranet with a tailored way to share, save and store information. Bulletin Boards are available to communicate corporate and staff messages, with each department having their own message board. The web based nature of SharePoint is improving the speed of communication on Council servers.
- 3.20. As more departments migrate to SharePoint it opens up new communication possibilities and streamlines the way documents are created, shared and stored, helping to improve and enforce the Council's communication and accessibility standards.
- 3.21. SharePoint will be the home of the Communication Toolkit - a one-stop-shop in the Corporate Document Centre for all the Communication policies and document templates for the Council. The Toolkit will contain:
- The Revised Communication Strategy
 - An Updated Media Relations Protocol
 - Revised Corporate Identity Guidelines
 - Consultation and Engagement Strategy
 - Writing for the Web Guidelines
 - Information Management Strategy
 - Use of Photographic Images of Children Policy
 - Customer Charter and Service Standards
 - Code of recommended practice for local authority publicity

4. Aim and Objectives

- 4.1. The Council's aim is:
'To best serve the people of Eden'.

This aim is supported by the Council's key priorities:

- Affordable Housing
- Quality Environment
- Economic Vitality
- Quality Council

5. Strategic Objectives

- 5.1. The strategic objectives of the Communication Strategy are:

- To seek to continually improve the public's perception and understanding of the Council and its services through improving external communication.
- To maximise the opportunities to communicate creatively and effectively through the use of new technology.
- To strengthen the Council's visual profile locally, regionally and nationally through consistent use of a strong corporate identity.
- To increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the Council and promote ways of improving communication between departments.

5.2. External Communication

- 5.2.1. We will encourage more engagement and consultation with the public and partners on service and policy development, to reposition the Council closer to the local community, emphasizing the transparency, accountability and democratic nature of the Council's decisions making processes.
- 5.2.2. We will proactively encourage Councillors, especially the Council Leader and Portfolio Holders to strengthen their engagement with the community especially using cost effective methods such as the website and social media.
- 5.2.3. We will seek to give equal support and attention to all geographical areas covered by the Council.
- 5.2.4. Research shows there is direct a correlation between the amount of information residents receive about their local Council and the amount of confidence and satisfaction they have with its services. We need to develop a varied way of communicating messages to the public, such as using social media to ensure a range of people understand our work and its aims and objectives.
- 5.2.5. The media is one of the primary external sources of information about the Council for many residents. So, how we work with the media to achieve a proactive relationship is identified separately in the Media Relations Protocol, which gives information on the issuing of information to the media and appropriate spokespeople.

5.3. E-Communication

To maximise the opportunities to communicate creatively and effectively through the use of new technology:

- We will continually seek out, exploit and resource the opportunities presented by electronic communication, internally and externally, to benefit the Council and the District.
- We will support the use of e-communication by training our staff and Councillors in its use.
- We will actively promote and raise awareness of the Council's website as the primary source of information for its services.
- We will seek to develop, co-ordinate and resource the use of social media and online blogs (for the Council Executive and Chief Executive) across the

Council as a cost effective way of engaging and communicating with local people.

- We will encourage and support the development of SharePoint as the data management and information tool for the Council.

5.4. Corporate Identity Guidelines and Accessible Information

- 5.4.1. Clearer branding of Council services strengthens the authority's visual profile locally, regionally and nationally. This is being achieved through the implementation of the Council's revised Corporate Identity Guidelines.
- 5.4.2. The Guidelines outline a clear branding framework for Council communications, including criteria for the production of accessible information, which must be adhered to, so that communications do not infringe the Disability Discrimination Act and meet the Council's own quality and diversity mandate.
- 5.4.3. This can be achieved through simple steps such as including an accessible information panel on all Council documents. This gives details of how people can obtain a summary of any Council information in any foreign languages or alternative format such as Braille.
- 5.4.4. Officers who require information to be translated into a foreign language or alternative format should contact either the Council's Access and Diversity Officer or Communication Officer in the first instance. See page 22 for contact details.
- 5.4.5. The revised Corporate Identity Guidelines are gradually being applied to all Council services. Initial work has included rebranding of:
 - Penrith Leisure Centre
 - Frenchfield Sports Centre
 - Community Wardens' vans
 - Website design template
 - Council finance documents, cheques etc
 - Licensing software system - standard letters, applications, notices etc
- 5.4.6. A range of corporate document templates are being developed and rolled out across the Council via SharePoint. The new templates help to ensure communications are clearly identifiable as being produced by Eden District Council and meet Disability Discrimination Act criteria.
- 5.4.7. The Council's Communication Officer and Secretarial Support Service staff are working to ensure these new Guidelines are adopted and implemented correctly in day-to-day communications.
- 5.4.8. Copies of the Corporate Identity Guidelines are available for staff to access via SharePoint.
- 5.4.9. All the new corporate templates will be available for staff to access via SharePoint's document centre. In terms of commercially designed documents, templates have been created for industry standard graphic design applications, so

that externally commissioned work meets the Council's branding and accessibility criteria.

- 5.4.10. Before producing any corporate communications, staff should refer to the Corporate Identity Guidelines for advice and to ensure the communications work they are intending to create meets Eden's branding and accessibility criteria.
- 5.4.11. The Communication Officer and Secretarial Services Team are available to help staff achieve this. See contact details on page 22.

5.5. Internal Communication

- 5.5.1. To increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the Council and promote ways of improving communication between departments:
 - We will create and maintain a strong two-way flow of information within the Council that supports and encourages teamwork, trust and loyalty.
 - We will inform all our staff and members of issues and events that affect the Council, and the impact it will have upon them.
 - We will consult our staff through formal and informal channels about the development of policies, practice and procedures.
 - We will listen as well as talk in our daily dealings with colleagues and elected members.

6. A Shared Responsibility for the Communication Strategy

6.1. The Role of Council Employees in Effective Communications

- 6.1.1. Good communication is the responsibility of all Council employees. Every officer will at some time communicate with other officers and directly or indirectly with members of the public.
- 6.1.2. Chief Officers have the responsibility to ensure that their staff are communicating effectively within their department, across departments, to Councillors, to the public and to partner organisations. It is their role to maintain standards, identify weaknesses and facilitate solutions for improving communication.
- 6.1.3. All employees are seen as ambassadors for the Council and its aim and objectives. Employees are expected to show courtesy and professionalism in communicating with councillors, colleagues, the public and others. (A separate chapter is included regarding dealing with sensitive issues, which recognises that some employees may have to communicate in difficult situations).
- 6.1.4. Senior Officers often have to represent the Council on the broadcast media and to journalists from electronic and traditional media. In order to be as effective as possible they should undertake regular media training.
- 6.1.5. The Council is committed to enabling a two-way communication process with employees and welcomes feedback and suggestions.
- 6.1.6. The Council employs a Communication Officer to provide support and advice to all sections of the Council on communication issues.

Other roles of the Communication Officer are as follows:

- Responding to all media enquiries made to the Council.
- Issuing media releases about the activities of the Council.
- Producing the Council's Newsletter.
- Providing media support to the Civic function of the Council's Chairman.

6.2. The Role of Councillors in Setting the Strategic Framework

- The principal role of Councillors is to determine policy and take decisions.
- In every case Councillors should always take into account the aims and objectives of the Council.
- Councillors should regard themselves as guardians of the Council's image and reputation, as community leaders they represent and champion Eden District.
- Councillors act as an important link between members of the public and the Council, providing important feedback on its policies, decisions and actions.
- Councillors need to have information to enable them to enact their role effectively.
- Councillors should be informed at the earliest possible opportunity about problems arising from the Council's activities, which could adversely affect its reputation.
- Officers should bear in mind the needs of Councillors when communicating information.
- Councillors often have to provide the official response to media enquiries in traditional and online media. In order to be as effective as possible, they should undertake regular media and IT training.

7. Working in Partnership

- 7.1. Eden District Council plays an active role on a number of strategic partnerships in Cumbria. These partnerships often adopt their own strategies for communication. Careful consideration should be given to any possible conflicts between the Council's own strategy and that of a Partnership.
- 7.2. In partnership working, recognition of the Council's contribution should be explicitly required and stated in accordance with its corporate branding as stipulated in the Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines.
- 7.3. In all partnership communications work the Council expects to receive parity with all other organisations. The Council's Communication Officer should be contacted to help prepare and advise on partnership communication work, so Eden's corporate reputation is not diminished or questioned, and that appropriate responses are delivered to media enquiries.

8. Stakeholders and Audiences

8.1. The Council has a wide range of stakeholders (defined as individuals or organisations who can affect or are affected by the Council's ability to achieve its objectives). Each of these groups can be described as audiences. So, when thinking about communication it is important to think also about the audience being targeted and how best to engage with them. The groups are listed below:

8.2. External

- Residents
- Visitors/Tourists
- Businesses
- Voluntary Sector/Public Sector Agencies
- Multi Agency/Regeneration Partnerships
- Pressure Groups
- Other Local Authorities in Cumbria
- Parish Councils
- Government Agencies
- The Media

8.3. Internal

- Eden District Councillors
- Council employees
- UNISON

8.4. Mechanisms

The Council communicates with its audiences in a wide variety of ways. These include:

- Website, including blogs
- Social media such as twitter and online videos
- SharePoint as an Intranet
- Staff Briefings (Departmental and Team Briefings)
- Elections
- Notice Boards
- Exhibitions (Local, National and International)
- Publications
- Posters
- Events

- Campaigns
- Meetings (Council, committee, public)
- Presentations at public meetings
- Site visits
- Site notices
- E-mail
- Voicemail
- Presentations to outside bodies
- Media Relations
- Telephone
- Advertising
- Direct mail
- Employees
- Councillors
- Unison
- Corporate Identity Guidelines
- Customer Contact Centre
- Reception Areas
- Complaints procedure
- Signage
- Providing Accessible Information
- Consultation
- Council Newsletter

9. Internal Communication

9.1. Every employee has a responsibility to communicate effectively with colleagues inside their departments and across the Council.

9.2. Chief Officers are responsible for:

- Identifying the appropriate communication methods required for Councillors and officers.
- Putting channels in place to ensure effective two-way communication.

9.3. Communicating with Councillors

9.3.1. Councillors need to be kept informed of what is going on in their area and across the district. There is also a need to identify better ways of communicating decisions that are being made between the Executive Portfolio Holders and their fellow Councillors. This is being considered by developing a Members' Communication Action Plan. The existing methods for communicating with Members are outlined below:

9.3.2. **Committee Reports:** All Councillors are sent copies of Council and Committee agendas by email. All Councillors are also sent hard copies of the agenda for Council. Hard copies of agendas for other Council committees and panels are sent to the Members of that committee or panel. Copies of all these documents are posted on the Members' Bulletin Board. Notices of decisions made by Portfolio Holders, the Executive, Council and Committees Meeting minutes are also

circulated Councillors, using the format stated above and are posted on the Members' Bulletin Board usually within five working days of a meeting.

- 9.3.3. **Briefing Notes for Councillors:** Briefing Notes are prepared and dispatched electronically as and when there is information to disseminate to Councillors, though this is not necessarily weekly. The Briefing Notes are arranged through the Democratic Services Section and is open for anyone to pass information onto Members. This method should be used to raise awareness of issues relating to committees and more general information.
- 9.3.4. **E-mail:** All Councillors are allocated an e-mail address and can be contacted in this way. Those who do not opt for a laptop or PC will still receive their e-mails. This is the preferred method of written communication. All Councillor email addresses are listed in the email Address Book contained on your PC and via SharePoint. Their contact details are publicly available at www.eden.gov.uk
- 9.3.5. **Members' Bulletin Board:** This contains all Council agendas, details of upcoming Members events and information notices.
- 9.3.6. **Telephone:** Most Councillors have a telephone; numbers are listed on SharePoint and www.eden.gov.uk. This method is ideal to pass on urgent messages.

9.4. Communicating within Departments

- 9.4.1. Every employee should be aware of:
- The aim, objectives and policies of the Council and how they contribute to their achievements.
 - The decisions and changes in policy, which affect the way they perform their job.
 - The standards expected of them in carrying out their duties.
 - Progress relating to long-term projects or initiatives.
- 9.4.2. Chief Officers are responsible for ensuring that staff within their department engage in suitable communication activities that encourage a two way dialogue at all levels in the department. The most appropriate methods are as follows:
- 9.4.3. **Team Meetings:** Every member of staff should have the opportunity to attend regular team meetings. These are usually held once a month. Team meetings should be a regular opportunity for staff to receive corporate information and to provide feedback on Council initiatives, policies and decisions.
- 9.4.4. **Briefings:** From time to time it will be necessary to hold briefings with officers on specific issues. Information gathered at these briefing sessions should be cascaded in larger departments.
- 9.4.5. **SharePoint/Corporate Bulletin Board:** SharePoint has replaced the Council's Intranet. The Corporate Bulletin Board is available on its homepage eCentral. Individual Bulletin Boards are also available for each Council department for managers and staff to use.
- 9.4.6. Corporate Bulletin Boards should be used to convey corporate information. All staff have a duty to read the information posted on these bulletin boards daily.

Staff who post information to bulletin boards are responsible for removing the information when it is out of date. A staff bulletin board is available for non-corporate information. Information should not be duplicated on the Staff and Corporate bulletin boards.

- 9.4.7. **Written Communication:** E-mail is a useful way of getting information out en-masse or to an individual, and provides a record of dialogue. This is the preferred method of written communication.
- 9.4.8. **Informal Meetings:** Face-to-face meetings with colleagues often provide the easiest and quickest resolution to an enquiry.
- 9.4.9. **Meetings:** It is sometimes necessary to bring groups of colleagues together to address a specific issue. This should only be done if the issue is too complex to handle in an electronic form (ie by Email).
- 9.4.10. **Open Door Policy:** Managers at all levels should encourage their staff to visit them on an ad-hoc basis with questions or feedback on specific issues. From time to time this may not be possible but should be adopted as a general policy.

9.5. Communication across Departments

- 9.5.1. In order for the Council to achieve its aims and objectives, communication must be 'joined up' and all officers have a responsibility to ensure that they are generally aware of the activities of the Council. The following methods will help to achieve this:
- 9.5.2. **Use of SharePoint:** All relevant departmental information should be posted on the SharePoint Bulletin Boards and kept up to date so that any member of staff can access information.
- 9.5.3. **Interdepartmental meetings:** It is necessary from time to time to arrange these meetings to address specific cross cutting issues.
- 9.5.4. Whole staff sessions are arranged as and when the Council need to inform staff and obtain feedback on key corporate issues. These are attended by Chief Officers.

9.6. Communicating with Unions and Staff

- 9.6.1. The Council is committed to working with the recognised trade union, UNISON, to continue to ensure stable and productive industrial relations. The following methods of communication are used:
- 9.6.2. **Joint Consultative Committee:** This is a formal consultation meeting and also acts as a medium for union and non-union representatives to meet with councillors and a representative of the Management Team on a regular basis.

9.7. Additional communication methods:

- 9.7.1. **Staff Induction:** A staff induction programme has been developed which includes annual customer care training sessions for finance staff as part of the Revenues and Benefits Charter Mark.
- 9.7.2. The Human Resources Department has a dedicated section on SharePoint (part of Corporate and Legal Services) which includes a raft of information for new and

existing staff, including consultations on Council policies and basic procedural forms.

- 9.7.3. The Council continually reviews and considers the training required for all new staff.
- 9.7.4. **Appraisals:** All staff have an annual appraisal of their performance and a six-month interim appraisal.
- 9.7.5. **Exit Feedback forms:** Staff leaving the Council are invited to complete an Exit Feedback Form and the Human Resources Manager should report any pertinent information to the Management Team.

10. External Communication

- 10.1. All employees and Councillors are responsible for ensuring that the guidelines set out in this strategy are followed to protect the image and reputation of the Council.
- 10.2. There are a number of external communication methods employed by the Council, they are:
- 10.3. **Advertising:** The Council is obliged to advertise statutory notices in the local press. Adverts, which are not statutory, should only be placed in publications which are relevant to the objectives of the publicity.
 - Templates for adverts are contained in the Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines. These include recruitment advertising, public notices and adverts for events etc. Templates for these adverts are shortly to be made available on SharePoint via the Document Centre. For advice on which publication to use for advertisements, staff should consult the Communication Officer. In all instances, the purpose and intended audience should be pre-considered in order to determine if use of an advert is an appropriate mechanism.
 - The Human Resources Department manages recruitment advertising. Council adverts should confirm to the guidance laid out in the Code of recommended practice for local authority publicity.
 - All information contained in advertisements should also be featured first on the Council's website as this is primary channel for Council communications.
- 10.4. **Consultation:** The Council's Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy is managed by the Consultation Officer and is available on the Council website www.eden.gov.uk (see Your Say section on the website's homepage). Any consultations should be pre-planned with the Council's Consultation Officer and be produced in accordance with the Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines so they are accessible.
 - Details of the public consultation should be displayed prominently on the Council's website, and copies available for reference in Council buildings. The consultation should also be publicised in the local media via the Communication Officer, and an appropriate Member or Chief Officer should be briefed to answer any media questions.
- 10.5. **Corporate Identity Guidelines:** The Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines have been revised and are being gradually rolled out across the Council. A copy of the

Guidelines are available for staff to use in the SharePoint Document Centre. The Guidelines should be referred to by all staff when considering any aspect of Council communication and appropriate templates are being developed for printed materials to improve the branding and accessibility of Council communications. These will be available on SharePoint in due course.

- The Communication Officer and Secretarial Support Team can offer staff advice on producing communications work inline with the revised Corporate Identity Guidelines. For contact details see page 22.

- 10.6. **Council Newsletter:** Eye on Eden is produced once a year and goes out to every household in the District along with Council Tax bills. The aim of the newsletter is to keep residents informed of the Council's work in a plain and accessible style. National MORI research has shown that residents prefer to receive information regarding how their money is being spent and how to access Council services. The information in this publication should reflect this. An accessible version of the document is available on the Council's website.
- 10.7. **Dealing with members of the public:** To the public, all Council employees represent the Council. If approached by a member of the public, all employees should endeavour to help the enquirer resolve their problem.
- 10.8. **Direct mail:** Letters should be written in clear English wherever possible and unavoidable legal or specialist terms should be explained. Letters should be set out according to the style guidelines contained within the Corporate Identity Guidelines. This includes appropriate use of colour letterhead. For more information and advice contact the Communication Officer and Secretarial Support Team for contact details see page 22.
- 10.9. **Email:** The Council has an information security policy, which includes an agreement for acceptable e-mail use, which all staff are required to sign before using the email system. Staff should check their email at least once per day. The appropriate corporate signature, font and background for all emails are contained within the Corporate Identity Guidelines.
- If a member of staff is on leave or away from the office (including working from home) an "auto-reply" should be set up and include the following information:
 - I am away from the office until [insert date] I will respond to your message on my return. If your message is urgent, please forward it to [insert email address].
 - The Contact Centre and the Line Manager/Section Head should be aware of any urgent communications issues that may arise during a period of staff absence, and who the appropriate member of staff is to deal with any enquires during this period.
- 10.10. **Events:** The Council may undertake to hold events to raise awareness of its work, its Members and specific issues. The format of these events will be matched to the purpose of the event and usually have invited guests as well as being open to the public, which will allow a chance for people to meet Councillors in an informal setting. Publicity for the event should be discussed with the Communication Officer.

- 10.11. **Exhibitions:** The Council has a pre-printed corporate exhibition stand, which is available for all staff to use at exhibitions promoting the Council. The display is deliberately non-specific and can be augmented with a tabletop display relating to the exhibition. The stand should be shown in its entirety and not be cluttered with unnecessary brochures or leaflets.
- 10.12. **Publications:** All publications should be fit for purpose and be appropriate for the intended audience. They should be designed using the templates and styles set out in the Corporate Identity Guide to ensure they convey the Council's branding correctly. To this end, all Council documents should use 'clear English' and the accessible information standards set out in the Corporate Identity Guidelines.
- The Communication Officer and Secretarial Support Team can offer staff advice on producing communications work in line with the revised Corporate Identity Guidelines. For contact details see page 22.
- 10.13. **Meetings (Council, committee, public):** The Council will encourage the public to ask questions at Council Meetings and Committees by publicising widely the procedures for doing so on the Council's website under the Democracy section.
- 10.14. **Presentations to outside bodies:** Officers are occasionally called on to provide presentations to outside bodies. When using PowerPoint, a corporate template is available from the Communication Officer or via the SharePoint document centre. All information presented or given out should adhere to the Corporate Identity Guidelines.
- 10.15. **Public speaking at Planning Application meetings:** Members of the public who request the opportunity to speak at meetings will be given appropriate information on what to expect and the protocols of the meeting. It will be normal practice for the Chairman of the meeting to introduce themselves to all public speakers before the start of the meeting.
- 10.16. **Access to Services:** When considering any communication it is necessary to consider the accessibility of the information for the user. Advice on producing accessible information inline with the Council's branding, is contained in the Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines.
- For information on how to get Council information translated into a foreign language or alternative format, or to find a translator, contact the Council's Access and Diversity Officer or Communication Officer see contact details on page 22.
- 10.17. **Signage:** Signage regarding access should be clearly displayed. The Council's main reception areas at Town Hall and Mansion House are accessible and have hearing loops installed. Design templates for signage are included in the Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines. For more information contact the Communication Officer see contact details on 22.
- 10.18. **Customer Charter and Service Standards:** These two documents contain details of service standards the public can expect to receive when they contact the Council ie response times for dealing with correspondence and telephone calls. The Council, through its Customer Contact Centre, has made a significant commitment to offering residents and visitors to Eden the very best in customer service. We now have one dedicated telephone number 01768 817817 through

which the public can access information on our services during normal working hours. Our website contains service information and is available 24/7. For more information about the Customer Charter and Service Standards contact the Customer Services Manager see contact details on page 22.

- 10.19. **Telephone:** Telephone calls should be answered within six rings and with the following greeting:

Usual greeting for a Customer Contact Centre call:

Good morning/afternoon, Eden District Council. My name is [insert name] How can I help you?

Usual greeting for direct line call

Good morning/afternoon, [insert name] speaking

Section Heads should ensure that adequate cover is provided when an officer is unable to answer their phone. A range of options are available with the Council's telephone system to cover when officers are unavailable. These include:

- Calls being diverted to another officer, or
- Group of officers (Hunt group)
- The Customer Contact Centre (may need to be used in exceptional circumstances)
- Voicemail is activated.

In some sections it may be more appropriate to adopt a different greeting. Section Heads should use their discretion in deciding whether to adopt the usual greeting or an amended version. (When diverting calls ensure that the destination of the divert is aware of their responsibility and the length of time you will be away from the office and of any impending urgent enquiries).

For more information on how to use voicemail and the various options please contact the Council's IT Section, email: helpdesk@eden.gov.uk

- 10.20. **Voicemail:** Officers must use Voicemail to receive their calls when they are not at their desk. The message should be accurate and include the following information:

Usual message for working hours

You have reached [name] the [insert job title] for Eden District Council. I'm afraid I'm away from my desk or on another call just now. Please leave me a message and I will get back to you.

Usual message for holidays or out of office days

You have reached [name] the [insert job title] for Eden District Council. I'm away from the office until [return date] if your call is urgent please contact [insert name] on [insert phone number]. If your call can wait until my return please leave me a message and I will get back to you.

All Voicemail should be checked at least once per day and messages responded to within twenty-four working hours. A warning light will appear on the handset of Cisco system phones to inform you of any new voicemail messages.

- 10.21. **Reception Areas:** Main reception areas are the responsibility of the Customer Contact Centre. A reception area creates the visitors' first impression. These areas should be kept clean and clear of unnecessary clutter (such as delivery boxes), and all leaflet racks should be regularly reviewed to ensure that leaflets are up to date and relevant. Priority should be given to the display of Council produced leaflets and information. Public Access computers at reception areas will be on suitable desks, signed and accessible for all users. Posters on public and Council notice boards should be removed when they are out of date and be neatly displayed.
- 10.22. **Website:** The website is the Council's primary communication channel and is available 24/7. The Corporate Identity Guidelines has information on branding elements the website should contain and technical standards it should adhere to meet accessibility criteria. We recognise that these standards are continuously evolving and will be reviewed annually to ensure they are kept up to date.

The technical management of the Website is the responsibility of the IT Section. Responsibility for the Council homepage is jointly shared between the Communication Officer and the Web Projects Manager.

Section Heads are responsible for ensuring that web pages on www.eden.gov.uk which contain information that reflects their area of responsibility are kept up to date with comprehensive and accurate information. Staff writing for the Council's website should produce information in accordance with the Writing for the Web Guidelines.

Training on how to use the website software, on styles and writing for the web is regularly available from IT Services for more information email: web.admin@eden.gov.uk.

11. Social Media

- 11.1. Currently social media is being used by the Council most proactively when undertaking public consultations. This work has achieved some positive recognition, and has led to the Council seeking to formalise how social media is used in the future to improve its communication, engagement and consultation with local residents using online videos, blogs, twitter and flickr.
- 11.2. A draft strategy for the use of social media and how this is going to be rolled out across the Council currently in the early stages of discussions by the Web Projects Manager, Communication Officer and Consultation Officer. The continuation of this work will form part of the Communication Strategy's Action Plan.

12. Media Relations

- 12.1. We recognise that the media is one of the primary external sources of information about the Council for many residents. So, how we work with the media to achieve a proactive relationship is identified separately in the Media Relations Protocol giving information on the issuing of media releases and appropriate spokespeople.

- 12.2. These procedures if followed correctly, will ensure contact with the media is well-managed for both officers and the Media.

13. Photography

- 13.1. If Council officers are intending to take photographs of people or persons for use in any Council media they must obtain the person or groups' prior consent. This is especially relevant when working with children (see Use of Photographic Images of Children Policy).
- 13.2. A Publicity Clearance Waiver is available from the Communication Officer. This can be sent to individuals or organisations that are taking part in Council events when a record of the activities is being documented, or where the media will be present. Images taken with permission can legally be stored and used over a four year period, then consent should be re-applied for from the individual concerned. If consent is not given, the pictures should be deleted.
- 13.3. When using photographs supplied externally in Council media, staff must ensure they have obtained permission from the author and are able to use the pictures without infringing their copyright, or have paid the necessary fee to use the images. For more information about the use of pictures please contact the Communication Officer see contact details on page 22.

14. Handling Unusually Sensitive Issues

- 14.1. Occasionally a major incident or accident of a serious and/or sensitive nature may occur. As soon as an Officer becomes aware of an emerging issue, which may affect the Council's reputation, they must report it to their Chief Officer who, in turn, will inform the Chief Executive and the Communication Officer. They will together agree the appropriate people to inform, from the following list:
- The Council Leader and Executive and relevant ward Councillors
 - Any other relevant employees of the Council
 - Relevant Partner organisations
 - The Contact Centre
- 14.2. The facts of the case should be assembled and disseminated on a confidential basis to the key individuals identified, and an official response agreed for active or re-active releases to the media. This may involve the drafting of a holding statement, a question and answer sheet, and/or giving media interviews.
- 14.3. The Communication Officer will be responsible for the monitoring of the communication of the issue and co-ordinating responses.
- 14.4. The Council has a Business Continuity Plan, which is available to all staff on SharePoint, and is reviewed and updated annually by the Council's Management Team. Its purpose is to minimise the disruption to Council services in the event of an emergency.

15. Information Retention and Disposal

- 15.1. How the Council stores and retains its data is a key part of how it communicates effectively. Everyone in the Council must take responsibility for how information is created, stored and managed on a daily basis.
- 15.2. This means ensuring that information we generate is created in the right format, in accordance with the Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines and is stored in a way that other members of staff can view it.
- 15.3. The Council is now using SharePoint as a means to improve how it communicates, shares and stores data. SharePoint's simple web-based structure means documents are easy to find in departmental sites and less draft documents are being created and circulated because SharePoint incorporates version control software. Changes can be seen and notified to the author as the document develops.
- 15.4. This means only one copy of a document needs to be created, managed and stored. Typically a document will go through the following steps:
- Roughs - often being worked on by one person
 - Drafts - typically being consulted upon, with a possibility of several people collaborating on the document
 - Final version - published
 - Historic - archived (much content doesn't need archiving though)
 - Dead - ready to delete
- 15.5. It is therefore crucial to the development of the Council that our data is correctly stored and managed as stipulated in the Information Management Strategy and that staff take responsibility for routinely tidying up the files and folders on a daily basis. For more information about SharePoint contact the IT helpdesk see page 23 for contact details.

16. Evaluation, Monitoring and Targets

- 16.1. A key element in any strategy is the ability to assess its effectiveness through evaluation and monitoring.
- 16.2. The following performance indicators should be used to monitor the Council's communications:
- Are we meeting the criteria outlined in the Customer Charter and Service Standards for how we deal with the public on a daily basis ie responding to telephone enquiries and correspondence by letter and email etc
 - The percentage of residents who feel that the Council keeps them informed. Measured through regular surveys with Community Voice.
 - The percentage of residents who feel that the Council consults with them regularly. Measured through regular surveys with Community Voice.

- Number of proactive media releases issued per year.
- The take up of media releases, by The Cumberland and Westmorland Herald, The Westmorland Gazette, The Cumberland News and News and Star, Radio Cumbria, Border TV and CFM Radio, Regional and National media as a percentage of the number issued.
- Evaluation of the use of social media and blogs and how they are influencing the public's perceptions of the Council.

16.3. The strategy should be reviewed annually and areas of concern should be reported to the Council's Management Team.

17. Training

17.1. In order to ensure that the actions suggested by this strategy are implemented a number of specific training programmes will be necessary. These are as follows:

- 17.1.1. **Communication Strategy:** To ensure that this strategy is read and understood by all staff and members briefing sessions will be arranged. All new staff will be shown where the Strategy is located on SharePoint and what it contains as part of the induction process.
- 17.1.2. **Email and the Internet:** All Staff and Councillors should have access to e-mail and the internet and be trained in its use.
- 17.1.3. **Media:** All Officers and Councillors who may be required to represent the Council to the Media should be given training.
- 17.1.4. **Customer Care:** All new employees should receive customer care training, including the use of the telephone, as part of their overall induction to the Council. All front line staff will continue to be given the opportunity to undergo refresher training if required.

18. Contact Information

Communication Officer (general communications/media issues):

Telephone: (01768) 212137
 Mobile 077159 90460
 E-mail: communication@eden.gov.uk

Secretarial Support Team Supervisor (templates/accessible information):

Telephone: (01768) 212183
 E-mail: yvonne.parkes@eden.gov.uk

Customer Services Manager (customer service standards):

Telephone: (01768) 212130
 E-mail: customer.services@eden.gov.uk

IT Helpdesk (SharePoint and IT):

E-mail: help.desk@eden.gov.uk

Web Admin Team (website administration):

Email: web.admin@eden.gov.uk

Access and Diversity Officer (equality and diversity):

Telephone: (01768) 212268

E-mail: stella.robinson@eden.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Eden District Council

Equality Impact Assessment

Name of Policy/Strategy being assessed
Communication Strategy

1. Stakeholders

Who are the stakeholders in relation to this Policy/Strategy?
Eden residents, those employed within Eden, local businesses, District Councils, Cumbria County Council, voluntary and community bodies, national, local and regional media organisations and other public services.

2. Differing Requirements

Is there any evidence that different groups could be affected differently or have alternate needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the Policy/Strategy? Please state whether the levels of evidence are high, medium or low or there is no evidence.				
Characteristic	High	Medium	Low	No
Age	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Disability	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Gender	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Language	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Racial Group	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Religion/Belief	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sexual Orientation	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Urban/Rural Resident	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

3. Evidence of Differing Requirements

If you have answered yes to any of the above characteristics, please describe either from local or national intelligence how different groups might be affected by this Policy/Strategy or could have different needs, experiences, issues or priorities in relation to the Policy/Strategy.

4. Addressing the Likely Effects of the Policy/Strategy

Please describe how differing needs/experiences, issues and priorities of the group(s) of people you have highlighted will be addressed.

This strategy aims to help improve how the Council communicates with the people it serves and includes measures to make more communications accessible and use alternative channels to broaden the reach of Council communications.

5. Opportunity to Promote Further

Is there a potential to promote equality of opportunity or community relations more effectively by altering the Policy/Strategy, or by working with others?

This Strategy could be changed or updated to reflect any future improvements in communication that make Council services more accessible for any groups or individual the Council is seeking to engage with.

6. Future Data requirements

What data is required in the future to ensure effective monitoring and who will monitor the Policy/Strategy?

This will depend on the type of communication material being produced, but with the revised Corporate Identity Guidelines it will be possible to assess if the information we are producing is accessible to a wider audience and meets our accessibility and communication mandates.

Job Title of Post Holder completing this EIA	Date EIA completed
Communication Officer	9 August 2010

